



# BRAND SPOTLIGHT: MARKBASS

**Markbass simply cannot be stopped. After wowing the world with their range of powerful-yet-lightweight Class D amplifiers, bass cabinets and pedals, the Italian firm, led by founder Marco De Virgiliis, have only continued their upwards trajectory, recently acquiring the famed D'Orazio string factory and even making their own instruments. To celebrate their new bass range, we corresponded with De Virgiliis via email and translated his responses to find out all about the history of the brand, the inspiration behind their new basses and find out what's next for the company.**

**Hi Marco, it's a pleasure to be able to interview you – I hope you're well in spite of the dire situation in Italy. Would you be able to explain to me a bit about your life before Markbass?**

The pleasure is mine, I'm truly grateful and honoured to be able to do this interview. When I was little, music was a huge passion for me. I studied clarinet at the University of Pescara, but inside of me a love for electronic music was born. My love for music also fused with another passion of mine: engineering. In 1996, under the brand name *Parsek*, I started making amplifiers and cabinets, whilst experiencing first-hand all the various duties of business life: purchasing, production, marketing, sales, liaising with artists, administration and distribution. I travelled all around Italy so that musicians could try out my equipment, and I sold my gear directly to Italian music stores – I'd drive more than 120,000km a year (with no air conditioning) and some nights I'd end up sleeping in my car just so that I could save money!

**What then inspired you to start up your very own business? Was this an idea you'd been considering for a long time, or was the process more spontaneous?**

At the end of the '90s I met Sterling Ball [son of Ernie Ball] and I collaborated with him to create a line of amplifiers for Music Man called Audiophile. During this time, I was somewhat of a trailblazer in pioneering the use of neodymium custom speakers for bass amplification. A few years later, in 2001, I decided that the moment had arrived for me to start my own business, and so Markbass was born. I started this adventure with enormous enthusiasm and passion; these traits have helped me to confront the various difficulties that I encountered throughout the journey, and thanks to the people that believed in me and the brand from the beginning until now, the dream has become reality!

**I'm constantly in awe of how well your amplifiers are able to capture the sonic nuances of each different bass guitar. Was this one of your main objectives whilst in the process of establishing Markbass?**

Absolutely – one of the first slogans for Markbass was "THE REAL SOUND OF YOUR BASS", which wasn't just a slogan. From the beginning, one of the objectives I've always strived to adhere to throughout the development of my amplifiers was to exalt and respect the unique characteristics of whichever instrument you are using.

**For me, the most impressive thing about a Markbass speaker cab is that it carries so much sonic power, yet is so light and portable. Without giving away any secrets, how were you able to achieve this?**

From the start I've provided people with the option of light, transportable amplifiers and cabinets, thanks to the pioneering use of neodymium custom speakers as well as the use of our own proprietary technology that we are still constantly in the process of developing. The "lightness", which is certainly appreciated by all, is only one of the characteristics of our products... every one of these characteristics is realised without any compromise in the final product – whether that be in its quality or sound – and these characteristics are fundamentals that we will never sacrifice!

**Could you please explain to us how Class D amplification varies from the norm? What was your reasoning behind using this form of amplification in the first place?**

From the start, I've always had a real desire to create and design something new, outside of the paradigm. Back in those days, all of the most popular bass amplifiers had more or less the same characteristics, but I've never liked imitating. So when it came to my amps, I had the same approach. Instead of using power amps commonly available on the market, I decided to develop my own proprietary amplifiers (MPT – Mark Proprietary Technology), which, in addition to being specifically designed to respect and glorify the sound of the instrument, also allowed for a drastic reduction in the weight of the amplifier. I remember a while back when we introduced our first 2kg models to NAMM and Musikmesse, the average weight of the competitors' amplifiers was around 7 or 8kg – people used words like "warm, punchy, clear, honest, accurate – even aggressive" to describe them... I still remember the incredulous look on their faces when they went to lift them.

**I've had a look at the Kimandu and Kilimanjaro Richard Bona Signature Basses – they're truly spectacular instruments, with all the detail that has gone into the design, the colour scheme, among other things. What was it like to work with Richard while you guys were designing this bass?**

For the Kimandu and Kilimanjaro basses, we were after an original design that was 'distant' enough from the norm; we worked closely together to develop and improve this design so as to offer a truly ergonomic, balanced instrument. One of the things that Richard and I have in common is that neither of us accepts compromise – Richard is one of the most appreciated and respected musicians in the world, and from the beginning, he made it clear to me that he would never put his name (nor his fingers) on an instrument that does not adhere to the highest qualitative standards.

Together with my team, we worked in constant contact with him, designing and improving the instrument step-by-step until both of us were 100% satisfied with the final product. We maintained the highest standards of musical artisanship, as well as a maniacal sense of attention to detail.

**The recent acquisition of D'Orazio Strings must be super exciting for you and your team. Could you tell us about the Markbass strategy towards string design?**

For the past few centuries, Abruzzo was the motherland of nearly all string manufacturers. The art of string-making was born in this beautiful part of the world, and many of the great string makers on the market today would be able to trace their origins back to Abruzzo. Being able to combine the experience of the master string makers with my own propensity towards innovation – along with research, use of new materials and technology – I would say this is the true strategy in the design of our new line of Markbass Strings.

**Finally, I'd like to congratulate you and your team on the success you've enjoyed over the last nearly 20 years. What is your vision for the future of Markbass, in terms of creative direction?**

Thank you from the heart for your congratulations – we're super proud of the international success of our products and we will never stop. Innovation is part of my philosophy of life, and we are constantly brimming with creative, new ideas. It's not by chance that one of our slogans is "Born to Run"... We have some cool news to share with you all this year, as well as heaps of exciting projects for the 20 year anniversary of Markbass in 2021... stay tuned!

**Markbass is distributed in Australia by CMC Music.**

**WRITTEN AND TRANSLATED BY DAVID TOMISICH**